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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000648

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TAGS: PREL PGOV MASS MARR EZ AF NATO

SUBJECT: USNATO PERMREP NULAND IN PRAGUE - PROMOTING
MISSILE DEFENSE, AFGHANISTAN CONTRIBUTIONS

Classified By: DCM Cameron Munter
for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: USNATO Ambassador Victoria Nuland visited Prague May 31 - June 1 to address an Atlantic Council-sponsored conference on the consequences for transatlantic relations of U.S. missile defense in Europe. At the conference, in press interviews, and in meetings with senior Czech leaders, Ambassador Nuland emphasized the U.S. vision that future NATO short and medium-range missile defense systems could be "bolted on" to the long-range system planned with the Czech Republic and Poland. The Czechs share this vision and will continue to promote it, both within the Alliance and with their own public. Ambassador Nuland countered the concern of some skeptics that Czech participation in missile defense somehow undermines NATO. Czech interlocutors believe Russia's intransigence on missile defense is linked to a wider push aimed at increasing its influence and bargaining leverage with the West. Czech planning to expand its effort in Afghanistan is in full swing, focusing on a Czech PRT for Lowgar for 2008. Defense Minister Parkanova hopes to announce planned contributions including an Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) at the June 14-15 Defense Ministerial in Brussels. End summary.

A Missile Defense Conference for the mostly converted

¶2. (U) Arriving to a sleepy gathering of suits, made up primarily of Czech transatlanticists in favor of missile defense, Ambassador Nuland spoke of a vision for NATO involvement that plugs neatly into Czech domestic political concerns. She reiterated the defensive nature of both missile defense and the NATO Alliance itself, reminding the audience that by hosting missile defense infrastructure the Czech Republic and Poland assume a genuine leadership role in the protection of all NATO allies. Both countries, by volunteering to host the missile defense system had taken a stride towards the indivisibility of security for NATO in the face of a commonly-accepted and growing threat from Iran. Ambassador Nuland asserted allies must move forward together to ensure NATO creates medium and short range missile defenses that could be bolted to the U.S.-led system

¶3. (U) Panel-member Ordrej Liska, the Green Party spokesman on foreign affairs, provided the only dissenting voice - arguing for greater discussion within the EU of the security implications for Europe, and claiming that briefings on missile defense at NATO do not go far enough in truly multilateralizing U.S. missile defense programs.

Czechs critical of Putin's multi-front strategy

¶4. (C) Ambassador Nuland held meetings with senior Czech security policy practitioners including Deputy PM Sasha Vondra, Defense Minister Vlasta Parkanova, Deputy Defense Minister Martin Bartak, and MFA Political Director Martin Povejsil. The Czech interlocutors were critical of what they see as Vladimir Putin's attempt to dominate Europe's security policy agenda by raising obstacles on many fronts. Czech theories on Putin's motives center on the Russian domestic political climate in the advance of a 2008 transition, and on genuine Russian paranoia among some of the old guard who still see NATO actions through the old Cold War lens of encirclement. While Putin clearly hopes to trade some his recently-inflated concerns for allied concessions, the Czechs leadership is not willing to barter on any of the issues, least of all missile defense.

Afghanistan - Czechs gear up for a PRT

¶5. (C) With a Czech PRT survey team on the ground in Lowgar, Ambassador Nuland encouraged the Czechs to identify potential financial partners early in the planning process to ensure they can offer enough support for good governance and development, in addition to providing security. Senior MFA and MOD leaders agreed they need a combined civilian-military team, with lots of resources and autonomy to partner with Afghan leaders in Lowgar. Defense Minister Parkanova seemed enthusiastic about the possibility of a Czech OMLT enhancing ANA capacity in the Czech PRT area of operations. She said she would meet with FM Schwarzenberg on June 4 to discuss the scope of possible Czech contributions to Afghanistan, which she plans to raise at the June 14-15 Defense Ministerial in

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Brussels.

Comment:

¶6. (C) Skeptics of missile defense in the Czech Republic have long called for the establishment of "a NATO missile defense system" instead of the one on offer from the United States. This approach has largely been a debating tactic used by politicians who believe a "NATO system" would be a political impossibility for both the U.S. and the Alliance. However, U.S. briefings at the NAC-R and the NRC coincided with an emerging understanding in Prague that many allies already work bilaterally with the U.S. on missile defense. Ambassador Nuland's conference appearance in Prague, and her participation in five separate press events, has helped further the idea in the Czech Republic that support for the missile defense radar will strengthen the NATO alliance rather than undermine it. There is still much work to be done in Prague, but momentum is beginning to swing in the right direction. This swing is being helped along the way by the influence of Russian hyperbole on Czechs historically familiar with "instructions" from Moscow. End comment.

¶7. (U) Ambassador Nuland has cleared this cable.

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